CHAPTER FIVE--THE GREAT DE BARRAL

Renovated certainly the saloon of the Ferndale was to receive the "strange woman." The mellowness of its old-fashioned, tarnished decoration was gone. And Anthony looking round saw the glitter, the gleams, the colour of new things, untried, unused, very bright--too bright. The workmen had gone only last night; and the last piece of work they did was the hanging of the heavy curtains which looped midway the length of the saloon--divided it in two if released, cutting off the after end with its companion-way leading direct on the poop, from the forepart with its outlet on the deck; making a privacy within a privacy, as though Captain Anthony could not place obstacles enough between his new happiness and the men who shared his life at sea. He inspected that arrangement with an approving eye then made a particular visitation of the whole, ending by opening a door which led into a large state-room made of two knocked into one. It was very well furnished and had, instead of the usual bedplace of such cabins, an elaborate swinging cot of the latest pattern. Anthony tilted it a little by way of trial. "The old man will be very comfortable in here," he said to himself, and stepped back into the saloon closing the door gently. Then another thought occurred to him obvious under the circumstances but strangely enough presenting itself for the first time. "Jove! Won't he get a shock," thought Roderick Anthony.

He went hastily on deck. "Mr. Franklin, Mr. Franklin." The mate was not very far. "Oh! Here you are. Miss . . . Mrs. Anthony'll be coming on board presently. Just give me a call when you see the cab."

Then, without noticing the gloominess of the mate's countenance he went in again. Not a friendly word, not a professional remark, or a small joke, not as much as a simple and inane "fine day." Nothing. Just turned about and went in.

We know that, when the moment came, he thought better of it and decided to meet Flora's father in that privacy of the main cabin which he had been so careful to arrange. Why Anthony appeared to shrink from the contact, he who was sufficiently self-confident not only to face but to absolutely create a situation almost insane in its audacious generosity, is difficult to explain. Perhaps when he came on the poop for a glance he found that man so different outwardly from what he expected that he decided to meet him for the first time out of everybody's sight. Possibly the general secrecy of his relation to the girl might have influenced him. Truly he may well have been dismayed. That man's coming brought him face to face with the necessity to speak and act a lie; to appear what he was not and what he could never be, unless, unless--

In short, we'll say if you like that for various reasons, all having to do with the delicate rectitude of his nature, Roderick Anthony (a man of whom his chief mate used to say: he doesn't know what fear is) was frightened. There is a Nemesis which overtakes generosity too, like all the other imprudences of men who dare to be lawless and proud . . . "

"Why do you say this?" I inquired, for Marlow had stopped abruptly and kept silent in the shadow of the bookcase.

"I say this because that man whom chance had thrown in Flora's way was both: lawless and proud. Whether he knew anything about it or not it does not matter. Very likely not. One may fling a glove in the face of nature and in the face of one's own moral endurance quite innocently, with a simplicity which wears the aspect of perfectly Satanic conceit. However, as I have said it does not matter. It's a transgression all the same and has got to be paid for in the usual way. But never mind that. I paused because, like Anthony, I find a difficulty, a sort of dread in coming to grips with old de Barral.

You remember I had a glimpse of him once. He was not an imposing personality: tall, thin, straight, stiff, faded, moving with short steps and with a gliding motion, speaking in an even low voice. When the sea was rough he wasn't much seen on deck--at least not walking. He caught hold of things then and dragged himself along as far as the after skylight where he would sit for hours. Our, then young, friend offered once to assist him and this service was the first beginning of a sort of friendship. He clung hard to one--Powell says, with no figurative intention. Powell was always on the lookout to assist, and to assist mainly Mrs. Anthony, because he clung so jolly hard to her that Powell was afraid of her being dragged down notwithstanding that she very soon became very sure-footed in all sorts of weather. And Powell was the only one ready to assist at hand because Anthony (by that time) seemed to be afraid to come near them; the unforgiving Franklin always looked wrathfully the other way; the boatswain, if up there, acted likewise but sheepishly; and any hands that happened to be on the poop (a feeling spreads mysteriously all over a ship) shunned him as though he had been the devil.

We know how he arrived on board. For my part I know so little of prisons that I haven't the faintest notion how one leaves them. It seems as abominable an operation as the other, the shutting up with its mental suggestions of bang, snap, crash and the empty silence outside--where an instant before you were--you were--and now no longer are. Perfectly devilish. And the release! I don't know which is worse. How do they do it? Pull the string, door flies open, man flies through: Out you go! Adios! And in the space where a second before you were

not, in the silent space there is a figure going away, limping. Why limping? I don't know. That's how I see it. One has a notion of a maiming, crippling process; of the individual coming back damaged in some subtle way. I admit it is a fantastic hallucination, but I can't help it. Of course I know that the proceedings of the best machine-made humanity are employed with judicious care and so on. I am absurd, no doubt, but still . . . Oh yes it's idiotic. When I pass one of these places . . . did you notice that there is something infernal about the aspect of every individual stone or brick of them, something malicious as if matter were enjoying its revenge of the contemptuous spirit of man. Did you notice? You didn't? Eh? Well I am perhaps a little mad on that point. When I pass one of these places I must avert my eyes. I couldn't have gone to meet de Barral. I should have shrunk from the ordeal. You'll notice that it looks as if Anthony (a brave man indubitably) had shirked it too. Little Fyne's flight of fancy picturing three people in the fatal four wheeler--you remember?--went wide of the truth. There were only two people in the four wheeler. Flora did not shrink. Women can stand anything. The dear creatures have no imagination when it comes to solid facts of life. In sentimental regions--I won't say. It's another thing altogether. There they shrink from or rush to embrace ghosts of their own creation just the same as any fool-man would.

No. I suppose the girl Flora went on that errand reasonably. And then, why! This was the moment for which she had lived. It was her only point of contact with existence. Oh yes. She had been assisted by the Fynes. And kindly. Certainly. Kindly. But that's not enough. There is a kind way of assisting our fellow-creatures which is enough to break their hearts while it saves their outer envelope. How cold, how infernally cold she must have felt--unless when she was made to burn with indignation or shame. Man, we know, cannot live by bread alone but hang me if I don't believe that some women could live by love alone. If there be a flame in human beings fed by varied ingredients earthly and spiritual which tinge it in different hues, then I seem to see the colour of theirs. It is azure . . . What the devil are you laughing at . . . "

Marlow jumped up and strode out of the shadow as if lifted by indignation but there was the flicker of a smile on his lips. "You say I don't know women. Maybe. It's just as well not to come too close to the shrine. But I have a clear notion of woman. In all of them, termagant, flirt, crank, washerwoman, blue-stocking, outcast and even in the ordinary fool of the ordinary commerce there is something left, if only a spark. And when there is a spark there can always be a flame . . . "

He went back into the shadow and sat down again.

"I don't mean to say that Flora de Barral was one of the sort that could live by

love alone. In fact she had managed to live without. But still, in the distrust of herself and of others she looked for love, any kind of love, as women will. And that confounded jail was the only spot where she could see it--for she had no reason to distrust her father.

She was there in good time. I see her gazing across the road at these walls which are, properly speaking, awful. You do indeed seem to feel along the very lines and angles of the unholy bulk, the fall of time, drop by drop, hour by hour, leaf by leaf, with a gentle and implacable slowness. And a voiceless melancholy comes over one, invading, overpowering like a dream, penetrating and mortal like poison.

When de Barral came out she experienced a sort of shock to see that he was exactly as she remembered him. Perhaps a little smaller. Otherwise unchanged. You come out in the same clothes, you know. I can't tell whether he was looking for her. No doubt he was. Whether he recognized her? Very likely. She crossed the road and at once there was reproduced at a distance of years, as if by some mocking witchcraft, the sight so familiar on the Parade at Brighton of the financier de Barral walking with his only daughter. One comes out of prison in the same clothes one wore on the day of condemnation, no matter how long one has been put away there. Oh, they last! They last! But there is something which is preserved by prison life even better than one's discarded clothing. It is the force, the vividness of one's sentiments. A monastery will do that too; but in the unholy claustration of a jail you are thrown back wholly upon yourself--for God and Faith are not there. The people outside disperse their affections, you hoard yours, you nurse them into intensity. What they let slip, what they forget in the movement and changes of free life, you hold on to, amplify, exaggerate into a rank growth of memories. They can look with a smile at the troubles and pains of the past; but you can't. Old pains keep on gnawing at your heart, old desires, old deceptions, old dreams, assailing you in the dead stillness of your present where nothing moves except the irrecoverable minutes of your life.

De Barral was out and, for a time speechless, being led away almost before he had taken possession of the free world, by his daughter. Flora controlled herself well. They walked along quickly for some distance. The cab had been left round the corner--round several corners for all I know. He was flustered, out of breath, when she helped him in and followed herself. Inside that rolling box, turning towards that recovered presence with her heart too full for words she felt the desire of tears she had managed to keep down abandon her suddenly, her half-mournful, half-triumphant exultation subside, every fibre of her body, relaxed in tenderness, go stiff in the close look she took at his face. He was different. There was something. Yes, there was something between them, something hard and impalpable, the ghost of these high walls.

How old he was, how unlike!

She shook off this impression, amazed and frightened by it of course. And remorseful too. Naturally. She threw her arms round his neck. He returned that hug awkwardly, as if not in perfect control of his arms, with a fumbling and uncertain pressure. She hid her face on his breast. It was as though she were pressing it against a stone. They released each other and presently the cab was rolling along at a jog-trot to the docks with those two people as far apart as they could get from each other, in opposite corners.

After a silence given up to mutual examination he uttered his first coherent sentence outside the walls of the prison.

"What has done for me was envy. Envy. There was a lot of them just bursting with it every time they looked my way. I was doing too well. So they went to the Public Prosecutor--"

She said hastily "Yes! Yes! I know," and he glared as if resentful that the child had turned into a young woman without waiting for him to come out. "What do you know about it?" he asked. "You were too young." His speech was soft. The old voice, the old voice! It gave her a thrill. She recognized its pointless gentleness always the same no matter what he had to say. And she remembered that he never had much to say when he came down to see her. It was she who chattered, chattered, on their walks, while stiff and with a rigidly-carried head, he dropped a gentle word now and then.

Moved by these recollections waking up within her, she explained to him that within the last year she had read and studied the report of the trial.

"I went through the files of several papers, papa."

He looked at her suspiciously. The reports were probably very incomplete. No doubt the reporters had garbled his evidence. They were determined to give him no chance either in court or before the public opinion. It was a conspiracy . . . "My counsel was a fool too," he added. "Did you notice? A perfect fool."

She laid her hand on his arm soothingly. "Is it worth while talking about that awful time? It is so far away now." She shuddered slightly at the thought of all the horrible years which had passed over her young head; never guessing that for him the time was but yesterday. He folded his arms on his breast, leaned back in his corner and bowed his head. But in a little while he made her jump by asking suddenly:

"Who has got hold of the Lone Valley Railway? That's what they were after mainly. Somebody has got it. Parfitts and Co. grabbed it--eh? Or was it that fellow Warner . . . "

"I--I don't know," she said quite scared by the twitching of his lips.

"Don't know!" he exclaimed softly. Hadn't her cousin told her? Oh yes. She had left them--of course. Why did she? It was his first question about herself but she did not answer it. She did not want to talk of these horrors. They were impossible to describe. She perceived though that he had not expected an answer, because she heard him muttering to himself that: "There was half a million's worth of work done and material accumulated there."

"You mustn't think of these things, papa," she said firmly. And he asked her with that invariable gentleness, in which she seemed now to detect some rather ugly shades, what else had he to think about? Another year or two, if they had only left him alone, he and everybody else would have been all right, rolling in money; and she, his daughter, could have married anybody--anybody. A lord.

All this was to him like yesterday, a long yesterday, a yesterday gone over innumerable times, analysed, meditated upon for years. It had a vividness and force for that old man of which his daughter who had not been shut out of the world could have no idea. She was to him the only living figure out of that past, and it was perhaps in perfect good faith that he added, coldly, inexpressive and thin-lipped: "I lived only for you, I may say. I suppose you understand that. There were only you and me."

Moved by this declaration, wondering that it did not warm her heart more, she murmured a few endearing words while the uppermost thought in her mind was that she must tell him now of the situation. She had expected to be questioned anxiously about herself--and while she desired it she shrank from the answers she would have to make. But her father seemed strangely, unnaturally incurious. It looked as if there would be no questions. Still this was an opening. This seemed to be the time for her to begin. And she began. She began by saying that she had always felt like that. There were two of them, to live for each other. And if he only knew what she had gone through!

Ensconced in his corner, with his arms folded, he stared out of the cab window at the street. How little he was changed after all. It was the unmovable expression, the faded stare she used to see on the esplanade whenever walking by his side hand in hand she raised her eyes to his face--while she chattered, chattered. It was the same stiff, silent figure which at a word from her would turn rigidly into a

shop and buy her anything it occurred to her that she would like to have. Flora de Barral's voice faltered. He bent on her that well-remembered glance in which she had never read anything as a child, except the consciousness of her existence. And that was enough for a child who had never known demonstrative affection. But she had lived a life so starved of all feeling that this was no longer enough for her. What was the good of telling him the story of all these miseries now past and gone, of all those bewildering difficulties and humiliations? What she must tell him was difficult enough to say. She approached it by remarking cheerfully:

"You haven't even asked me where I am taking you." He started like a somnambulist awakened suddenly, and there was now some meaning in his stare; a sort of alarmed speculation. He opened his mouth slowly. Flora struck in with forced gaiety. "You would never, guess."

He waited, still more startled and suspicious. "Guess! Why don't you tell me?"

He uncrossed his arms and leaned forward towards her. She got hold of one of his hands. "You must know first . . . " She paused, made an effort: "I am married, papa."

For a moment they kept perfectly still in that cab rolling on at a steady jog-trot through a narrow city street full of bustle. Whatever she expected she did not expect to feel his hand snatched away from her grasp as if from a burn or a contamination. De Barral fresh from the stagnant torment of the prison (where nothing happens) had not expected that sort of news. It seemed to stick in his throat. In strangled low tones he cried out, "You--married? You, Flora! When? Married! What for? Who to? Married!"

His eyes which were blue like hers, only faded, without depth, seemed to start out of their orbits. He did really look as if he were choking. He even put his hand to his collar . . . "

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"You know," continued Marlow out of the shadow of the bookcase and nearly invisible in the depths of the arm-chair, "the only time I saw him he had given me the impression of absolute rigidity, as though he had swallowed a poker. But it seems that he could collapse. I can hardly picture this to myself. I understand that he did collapse to a certain extent in his corner of the cab. The unexpected had crumpled him up. She regarded him perplexed, pitying, a little disillusioned, and nodded at him gravely: Yes. Married. What she did not like was to see him smile in a manner far from encouraging to the devotion of a daughter. There was

something unintentionally savage in it. Old de Barral could not quite command his muscles, as yet. But he had recovered command of his gentle voice.

"You were just saying that in this wide world there we were, only you and I, to stick to each other."

She was dimly aware of the scathing intention lurking in these soft low tones, in these words which appealed to her poignantly. She defended herself. Never, never for a single moment had she ceased to think of him. Neither did he cease to think of her, he said, with as much sinister emphasis as he was capable of.

"But, papa," she cried, "I haven't been shut up like you." She didn't mind speaking of it because he was innocent. He hadn't been understood. It was a misfortune of the most cruel kind but no more disgraceful than an illness, a maiming accident or some other visitation of blind fate. "I wish I had been too. But I was alone out in the world, the horrid world, that very world which had used you so badly."

"And you couldn't go about in it without finding somebody to fall in love with?" he said. A jealous rage affected his brain like the fumes of wine, rising from some secret depths of his being so long deprived of all emotions. The hollows at the corners of his lips became more pronounced in the puffy roundness of his cheeks. Images, visions, obsess with particular force, men withdrawn from the sights and sounds of active life. "And I did nothing but think of you!" he exclaimed under his breath, contemptuously. "Think of you! You haunted me, I tell you."

Flora said to herself that there was a being who loved her. "Then we have been haunting each other," she declared with a pang of remorse. For indeed he had haunted her nearly out of the world, into a final and irremediable desertion. "Some day I shall tell you . . . No. I don't think I can ever tell you. There was a time when I was mad. But what's the good? It's all over now. We shall forget all this. There shall be nothing to remind us."

De Barral moved his shoulders.

"I should think you were mad to tie yourself to . . . How long is it since you are married?"

She answered "Not long" that being the only answer she dared to make. Everything was so different from what she imagined it would be. He wanted to know why she had said nothing of it in any of her letters; in her last letter. She said:

"It was after."

"So recently!" he wondered. "Couldn't you wait at least till I came out? You could have told me; asked me; consulted me! Let me see--"

She shook her head negatively. And he was appalled. He thought to himself: Who can he be? Some miserable, silly youth without a penny. Or perhaps some scoundrel? Without making any expressive movement he wrung his loosely-clasped hands till the joints cracked. He looked at her. She was pretty. Some low scoundrel who will cast her off. Some plausible vagabond . . . "You couldn't wait--eh?"

Again she made a slight negative sign.

"Why not? What was the hurry?" She cast down her eyes. "It had to be. Yes. It was sudden, but it had to be."

He leaned towards her, his mouth open, his eyes wild with virtuous anger, but meeting the absolute candour of her raised glance threw himself back into his corner again.

"So tremendously in love with each other--was that it? Couldn't let a father have his daughter all to himself even for a day after--after such a separation. And you know I never had anyone, I had no friends. What did I want with those people one meets in the City. The best of them are ready to cut your throat. Yes! Business men, gentlemen, any sort of men and women--out of spite, or to get something. Oh yes, they can talk fair enough if they think there's something to be got out of you . . . " His voice was a mere breath yet every word came to Flora as distinctly as if charged with all the moving power of passion . . . "My girl, I looked at them making up to me and I would say to myself: What do I care for all that! I am a business man. I am the great Mr. de Barral (yes, yes, some of them twisted their mouths at it, but I was the great Mr. de Barral) and I have my little girl. I wanted nobody and I have never had anybody."

A true emotion had unsealed his lips but the words that came out of them were no louder than the murmur of a light wind. It died away.

"That's just it," said Flora de Barral under her breath. Without removing his eyes from her he took off his hat. It was a tall hat. The hat of the trial. The hat of the thumb-nail sketches in the illustrated papers. One comes out in the same clothes, but seclusion counts! It is well known that lurid visions haunt secluded men, monks, hermits--then why not prisoners? De Barral the convict took off the silk hat of the financier de Barral and deposited it on the front seat of the cab.

Then he blew out his cheeks. He was red in the face.

"And then what happens?" he began again in his contained voice. "Here I am, overthrown, broken by envy, malice and all uncharitableness. I come out--and what do I find? I find that my girl Flora has gone and married some man or other, perhaps a fool, how do I know; or perhaps--anyway not good enough."

"Stop, papa."

"A silly love affair as likely as not," he continued monotonously, his thin lips writhing between the ill-omened sunk corners. "And a very suspicious thing it is too, on the part of a loving daughter."

She tried to interrupt him but he went on till she actually clapped her hand on his mouth. He rolled his eyes a bit but when she took her hand away he remained silent.

"Wait. I must tell you . . . And first of all, papa, understand this, for everything's in that: he is the most generous man in the world. He is . . . "

De Barral very still in his corner uttered with an effort "You are in love with him."

"Papa! He came to me. I was thinking of you. I had no eyes for anybody. I could no longer bear to think of you. It was then that he came. Only then. At that time when--when I was going to give up."

She gazed into his faded blue eyes as if yearning to be understood, to be given encouragement, peace--a word of sympathy. He declared without animation "I would like to break his neck."

She had the mental exclamation of the overburdened.

"Oh my God!" and watched him with frightened eyes. But he did not appear insane or in any other way formidable. This comforted her. The silence lasted for some little time. Then suddenly he asked:

"What's your name then?"

For a moment in the profound trouble of the task before her she did not understand what the question meant. Then, her face faintly flushing, she whispered: "Anthony."

Her father, a red spot on each cheek, leaned his head back wearily in the corner

of the cab.

"Anthony. What is he? Where did he spring from?"

"Papa, it was in the country, on a road--"

He groaned, "On a road," and closed his eyes.

"It's too long to explain to you now. We shall have lots of time. There are things I could not tell you now. But some day. Some day. For now nothing can part us. Nothing. We are safe as long as we live--nothing can ever come between us."

"You are infatuated with the fellow," he remarked, without opening his eyes. And she said: "I believe in him," in a low voice. "You and I must believe in him."

"Who the devil is he?"

"He's the brother of the lady--you know Mrs. Fyne, she knew mother--who was so kind to me. I was staying in the country, in a cottage, with Mr. and Mrs. Fyne. It was there that we met. He came on a visit. He noticed me. I--well--we are married now."

She was thankful that his eyes were shut. It made it easier to talk of the future she had arranged, which now was an unalterable thing. She did not enter on the path of confidences. That was impossible. She felt he would not understand her. She felt also that he suffered. Now and then a great anxiety gripped her heart with a mysterious sense of guilt--as though she had betrayed him into the hands of an enemy. With his eyes shut he had an air of weary and pious meditation. She was a little afraid of it. Next moment a great pity for him filled her heart. And in the background there was remorse. His face twitched now and then just perceptibly. He managed to keep his eyelids down till he heard that the 'husband' was a sailor and that he, the father, was being taken straight on board ship ready to sail away from this abominable world of treacheries, and scorns and envies and lies, away, away over the blue sea, the sure, the inaccessible, the uncontaminated and spacious refuge for wounded souls.

Something like that. Not the very words perhaps but such was the general sense of her overwhelming argument--the argument of refuge.

I don't think she gave a thought to material conditions. But as part of that argument set forth breathlessly, as if she were afraid that if she stopped for a moment she could never go on again, she mentioned that generosity of a stormy type, which had come to her from the sea, had caught her up on the brink of

unmentionable failure, had whirled her away in its first ardent gust and could be trusted now, implicitly trusted, to carry them both, side by side, into absolute safety.

She believed it, she affirmed it. He understood thoroughly at last, and at once the interior of that cab, of an aspect so pacific in the eyes of the people on the pavements, became the scene of a great agitation. The generosity of Roderick Anthony--the son of the poet--affected the ex-financier de Barral in a manner which must have brought home to Flora de Barral the extreme arduousness of the business of being a woman. Being a woman is a terribly difficult trade since it consists principally of dealings with men. This man--the man inside the cab--cast oft his stiff placidity and behaved like an animal. I don't mean it in an offensive sense. What he did was to give way to an instinctive panic. Like some wild creature scared by the first touch of a net falling on its back, old de Barral began to struggle, lank and angular, against the empty air--as much of it as there was in the cab--with staring eyes and gasping mouth from which his daughter shrank as far as she could in the confined space.

"Stop the cab. Stop him I tell you. Let me get out!" were the strangled exclamations she heard. Why? What for? To do what? He would hear nothing. She cried to him "Papa! Papa! What do you want to do?" And all she got from him was: "Stop. I must get out. I want to think. I must get out to think."

It was a mercy that he didn't attempt to open the door at once. He only stuck his head and shoulders out of the window crying to the cabman. She saw the consequences, the cab stopping, a crowd collecting around a raving old gentleman . . . In this terrible business of being a woman so full of fine shades, of delicate perplexities (and very small rewards) you can never know what rough work you may have to do, at any moment. Without hesitation Flora seized her father round the body and pulled back--being astonished at the ease with which she managed to make him drop into his seat again. She kept him there resolutely with one hand pressed against his breast, and leaning across him, she, in her turn put her head and shoulders out of the window. By then the cab had drawn up to the curbstone and was stopped. "No! I've changed my mind. Go on please where you were told first. To the docks."

She wondered at the steadiness of her own voice. She heard a grunt from the driver and the cab began to roll again. Only then she sank into her place keeping a watchful eye on her companion. He was hardly anything more by this time. Except for her childhood's impressions he was just--a man. Almost a stranger. How was one to deal with him? And there was the other too. Also almost a stranger. The trade of being a woman was very difficult. Too difficult. Flora closed her eyes saying to herself: "If I think too much about it I shall go mad."

And then opening them she asked her father if the prospect of living always with his daughter and being taken care of by her affection away from the world, which had no honour to give to his grey hairs, was such an awful prospect.

"Tell me, is it so bad as that?"

She put that question sadly, without bitterness. The famous--or notorious--de Barral had lost his rigidity now. He was bent. Nothing more deplorably futile than a bent poker. He said nothing. She added gently, suppressing an uneasy remorseful sigh:

"And it might have been worse. You might have found no one, no one in all this town, no one in all the world, not even me! Poor papa!"

She made a conscience-stricken movement towards him thinking: "Oh! I am horrible, I am horrible." And old de Barral, scared, tired, bewildered by the extraordinary shocks of his liberation, swayed over and actually leaned his head on her shoulder, as if sorrowing over his regained freedom.

The movement by itself was touching. Flora supporting him lightly imagined that he was crying; and at the thought that had she smashed in a quarry that shoulder, together with some other of her bones, this grey and pitiful head would have had nowhere to rest, she too gave way to tears. They flowed quietly, easing her overstrained nerves. Suddenly he pushed her away from him so that her head struck the side of the cab, pushing himself away too from her as if something had stung him.

All the warmth went out of her emotion. The very last tears turned cold on her cheek. But their work was done. She had found courage, resolution, as women do, in a good cry. With his hand covering the upper part of his face whether to conceal his eyes or to shut out an unbearable sight, he was stiffening up in his corner to his usual poker-like consistency. She regarded him in silence. His thin obstinate lips moved. He uttered the name of the cousin--the man, you remember, who did not approve of the Fynes, and whom rightly or wrongly little Fyne suspected of interested motives, in view of de Barral having possibly put away some plunder, somewhere before the smash.

I may just as well tell you at once that I don't know anything more of him. But de Barral was of the opinion, speaking in his low voice from under his hand, that this relation would have been only too glad to have secured his guidance.

"Of course I could not come forward in my own name, or person. But the advice of a man of my experience is as good as a fortune to anybody wishing to venture

into finance. The same sort of thing can be done again."

He shuffled his feet a little, let fall his hand; and turning carefully toward his daughter his puffy round cheeks, his round chin resting on his collar, he bent on her the faded, resentful gaze of his pale eyes, which were wet.

"The start is really only a matter of judicious advertising. There's no difficulty. And here you go and . . . "

He turned his face away. "After all I am still de Barral, the de Barral. Didn't you remember that?"

"Papa," said Flora; "listen. It's you who must remember that there is no longer a de Barral . . . " He looked at her sideways anxiously. "There is Mr. Smith, whom no harm, no trouble, no wicked lies of evil people can ever touch."

"Mr. Smith," he breathed out slowly. "Where does he belong to? There's not even a Miss Smith."

"There is your Flora."

"My Flora! You went and . . . I can't bear to think of it. It's horrible."

"Yes. It was horrible enough at times," she said with feeling, because somehow, obscurely, what this man said appealed to her as if it were her own thought clothed in an enigmatic emotion. "I think with shame sometimes how I . . . No not yet. I shall not tell you. At least not now."

The cab turned into the gateway of the dock. Flora handed the tall hat to her father. "Here, papa. And please be good. I suppose you love me. If you don't, then I wonder who--"

He put the hat on, and stiffened hard in his corner, kept a sidelong glance on his girl. "Try to be nice for my sake. Think of the years I have been waiting for you. I do indeed want support--and peace. A little peace."

She clasped his arm suddenly with both hands pressing with all her might as if to crush the resistance she felt in him. "I could not have peace if I did not have you with me. I won't let you go. Not after all I went through. I won't." The nervous force of her grip frightened him a little. She laughed suddenly. "It's absurd. It's as if I were asking you for a sacrifice. What am I afraid of? Where could you go? I mean now, to-day, to-night? You can't tell me. Have you thought of it? Well I have been thinking of it for the last year. Longer. I nearly went mad trying to

find out. I believe I was mad for a time or else I should never have thought . . . "

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"This was as near as she came to a confession," remarked Marlow in a changed tone. "The confession I mean of that walk to the top of the quarry which she reproached herself with so bitterly. And he made of it what his fancy suggested. It could not possibly be a just notion. The cab stopped alongside the ship and they got out in the manner described by the sensitive Franklin. I don't know if they suspected each other's sanity at the end of that drive. But that is possible. We all seem a little mad to each other; an excellent arrangement for the bulk of humanity which finds in it an easy motive of forgiveness. Flora crossed the quarter-deck with a rapidity born of apprehension. It had grown unbearable. She wanted this business over. She was thankful on looking back to see he was following her. "If he bolts away," she thought, "then I shall know that I am of no account indeed! That no one loves me, that words and actions and protestations and everything in the world is false--and I shall jump into the dock. That at least won't lie."

Well I don't know. If it had come to that she would have been most likely fished out, what with her natural want of luck and the good many people on the quay and on board. And just where the Ferndale was moored there hung on a wall (I know the berth) a coil of line, a pole, and a life-buoy kept there on purpose to save people who tumble into the dock. It's not so easy to get away from life's betrayals as she thought. However it did not come to that. He followed her with his quick gliding walk. Mr. Smith! The liberated convict de Barral passed off the solid earth for the last time, vanished for ever, and there was Mr. Smith added to that world of waters which harbours so many queer fishes. An old gentleman in a silk hat, darting wary glances. He followed, because mere existence has its claims which are obeyed mechanically. I have no doubt he presented a respectable figure. Father-in-law. Nothing more respectable. But he carried in his heart the confused pain of dismay and affection, of involuntary repulsion and pity. Very much like his daughter. Only in addition he felt a furious jealousy of the man he was going to see.

A residue of egoism remains in every affection--even paternal. And this man in the seclusion of his prison had thought himself into such a sense of ownership of that single human being he had to think about, as may well be inconceivable to us who have not had to serve a long (and wickedly unjust) sentence of penal servitude. She was positively the only thing, the one point where his thoughts found a resting-place, for years. She was the only outlet for his imagination. He had not much of that faculty to be sure, but there was in it the force of concentration. He felt outraged, and perhaps it was an absurdity on his part, but

I venture to suggest rather in degree than in kind. I have a notion that no usual, normal father is pleased at parting with his daughter. No. Not even when he rationally appreciates "Jane being taken off his hands" or perhaps is able to exult at an excellent match. At bottom, quite deep down, down in the dark (in some cases only by digging), there is to be found a certain repugnance . . . With mothers of course it is different. Women are more loyal, not to each other, but to their common femininity which they behold triumphant with a secret and proud satisfaction.

The circumstances of that match added to Mr. Smith's indignation. And if he followed his daughter into that ship's cabin it was as if into a house of disgrace and only because he was still bewildered by the suddenness of the thing. His will, so long lying fallow, was overborne by her determination and by a vague fear of that regained liberty.

You will be glad to hear that Anthony, though he did shirk the welcome on the quay, behaved admirably, with the simplicity of a man who has no small meannesses and makes no mean reservations. His eyes did not flinch and his tongue did not falter. He was, I have it on the best authority, admirable in his earnestness, in his sincerity and also in his restraint. He was perfect. Nevertheless the vital force of his unknown individuality addressing him so familiarly was enough to fluster Mr. Smith. Flora saw her father trembling in all his exiguous length, though he held himself stiffer than ever if that was possible. He muttered a little and at last managed to utter, not loud of course but very distinctly: "I am here under protest," the corners of his mouth sunk disparagingly, his eyes stony. "I am here under protest. I have been locked up by a conspiracy. I--"

He raised his hands to his forehead--his silk hat was on the table rim upwards; he had put it there with a despairing gesture as he came in--he raised his hands to his forehead. "It seems to me unfair. I--" He broke off again. Anthony looked at Flora who stood by the side of her father.

"Well, sir, you will soon get used to me. Surely you and she must have had enough of shore-people and their confounded half-and-half ways to last you both for a life-time. A particularly merciful lot they are too. You ask Flora. I am alluding to my own sister, her best friend, and not a bad woman either as they go."

The captain of the Ferndale checked himself. "Lucky thing I was there to step in. I want you to make yourself at home, and before long--"

The faded stare of the Great de Barral silenced Anthony by its inexpressive fixity.

He signalled with his eyes to Flora towards the door of the state-room fitted specially to receive Mr. Smith, the free man. She seized the free man's hat off the table and took him caressingly under the arm. "Yes! This is home, come and see your room, papa!"

Anthony himself threw open the door and Flora took care to shut it carefully behind herself and her father. "See," she began but desisted because it was clear that he would look at none of the contrivances for his comfort. She herself had hardly seen them before. He was looking only at the new carpet and she waited till he should raise his eyes.

He didn't do that but spoke in his usual voice. "So this is your husband, that . . . And I locked up!"

"Papa, what's the good of harping on that," she remonstrated no louder. "He is kind."

"And you went and . . . married him so that he should be kind to me. Is that it? How did you know that I wanted anybody to be kind to me?"

"How strange you are!" she said thoughtfully.

"It's hard for a man who has gone through what I have gone through to feel like other people. Has that occurred to you? . . . " He looked up at last . . . "Mrs. Anthony, I can't bear the sight of the fellow." She met his eyes without flinching and he added, "You want to go to him now." His mild automatic manner seemed the effect of tremendous self-restraint--and yet she remembered him always like that. She felt cold all over.

"Why, of course, I must go to him," she said with a slight start.

He gnashed his teeth at her and she went out.

Anthony had not moved from the spot. One of his hands was resting on the table. She went up to him, stopped, then deliberately moved still closer. "Thank you, Roderick."

"You needn't thank me," he murmured. "It's I who . . . "

"No, perhaps I needn't. You do what you like. But you are doing it well."

He sighed then hardly above a whisper because they were near the state- room door, "Upset, eh?"

She made no sign, no sound of any kind. The thorough falseness of the position weighed on them both. But he was the braver of the two. "I dare say. At first. Did you think of telling him you were happy?"

"He never asked me," she smiled faintly at him. She was disappointed by his quietness. "I did not say more than I was absolutely obliged to say--of myself." She was beginning to be irritated with this man a little. "I told him I had been very lucky," she said suddenly despondent, missing Anthony's masterful manner, that something arbitrary and tender which, after the first scare, she had accustomed herself to look forward to with pleasurable apprehension. He was contemplating her rather blankly. She had not taken off her outdoor things, hat, gloves. She was like a caller. And she had a movement suggesting the end of a not very satisfactory business call. "Perhaps it would be just as well if we went ashore. Time yet."

He gave her a glimpse of his unconstrained self in the low vehement "You dare!" which sprang to his lips and out of them with a most menacing inflexion.

"You dare . . . What's the matter now?"

These last words were shot out not at her but at some target behind her back. Looking over her shoulder she saw the bald head with black bunches of hair of the congested and devoted Franklin (he had his cap in his hand) gazing sentimentally from the saloon doorway with his lobster eyes. He was heard from the distance in a tone of injured innocence reporting that the berthing master was alongside and that he wanted to move the ship into the basin before the crew came on board.

His captain growled "Well, let him," and waved away the ulcerated and pathetic soul behind these prominent eyes which lingered on the offensive woman while the mate backed out slowly. Anthony turned to Flora.

"You could not have meant it. You are as straight as they make them."

"I am trying to be."

"Then don't joke in that way. Think of what would become of--me."

"Oh yes. I forgot. No, I didn't mean it. It wasn't a joke. It was forgetfulness. You wouldn't have been wronged. I couldn't have gone. I--I am too tired."

He saw she was swaying where she stood and restrained himself violently from

taking her into his arms, his frame trembling with fear as though he had been tempted to an act of unparalleled treachery. He stepped aside and lowering his eyes pointed to the door of the stern-cabin. It was only after she passed by him that he looked up and thus he did not see the angry glance she gave him before she moved on. He looked after her. She tottered slightly just before reaching the door and flung it to behind her nervously.

Anthony--he had felt this crash as if the door had been slammed inside his very breast--stood for a moment without moving and then shouted for Mrs. Brown. This was the steward's wife, his lucky inspiration to make Flora comfortable. "Mrs. Brown! Mrs. Brown!" At last she appeared from somewhere. "Mrs. Anthony has come on board. Just gone into the cabin. Hadn't you better see if you can be of any assistance?"

"Yes, sir."

And again he was alone with the situation he had created in the hardihood and inexperience of his heart. He thought he had better go on deck. In fact he ought to have been there before. At any rate it would be the usual thing for him to be on deck. But a sound of muttering and of faint thuds somewhere near by arrested his attention. They proceeded from Mr. Smith's room, he perceived. It was very extraordinary. "He's talking to himself," he thought. "He seems to be thumping the bulkhead with his fists--or his head."

Anthony's eyes grew big with wonder while he listened to these noises. He became so attentive that he did not notice Mrs. Brown till she actually stopped before him for a moment to say:

"Mrs. Anthony doesn't want any assistance, sir."

* * * * *

This was you understand the voyage before Mr. Powell--young Powell then--joined the Ferndale; chance having arranged that he should get his start in life in that particular ship of all the ships then in the port of London. The most unrestful ship that ever sailed out of any port on earth. I am not alluding to her sea-going qualities. Mr. Powell tells me she was as steady as a church. I mean unrestful in the sense, for instance in which this planet of ours is unrestful--a matter of an uneasy atmosphere disturbed by passions, jealousies, loves, hates and the troubles of transcendental good intentions, which, though ethically valuable, I have no doubt cause often more unhappiness than the plots of the most evil tendency. For those who refuse to believe in chance he, I mean Mr. Powell, must have been obviously predestined to add his native ingenuousness to the sum of

all the others carried by the honest ship Ferndale. He was too ingenuous. Everybody on board was, exception being made of Mr. Smith who, however, was simple enough in his way, with that terrible simplicity of the fixed idea, for which there is also another name men pronounce with dread and aversion. His fixed idea was to save his girl from the man who had possessed himself of her (I use these words on purpose because the image they suggest was clearly in Mr. Smith's mind), possessed himself unfairly of her while he, the father, was locked up.

"I won't rest till I have got you away from that man," he would murmur to her after long periods of contemplation. We know from Powell how he used to sit on the skylight near the long deck-chair on which Flora was reclining, gazing into her face from above with an air of guardianship and investigation at the same time.

It is almost impossible to say if he ever had considered the event rationally. The avatar of de Barral into Mr. Smith had not been effected without a shock--that much one must recognize. It may be that it drove all practical considerations out of his mind, making room for awful and precise visions which nothing could dislodge afterwards.

And it might have been the tenacity, the unintelligent tenacity, of the man who had persisted in throwing millions of other people's thrift into the Lone Valley Railway, the Labrador Docks, the Spotted Leopard Copper Mine, and other grotesque speculations exposed during the famous de Barral trial, amongst murmurs of astonishment mingled with bursts of laughter. For it is in the Courts of Law that Comedy finds its last refuge in our deadly serious world. As to tears and lamentations, these were not heard in the august precincts of comedy, because they were indulged in privately in several thousand homes, where, with a fine dramatic effect, hunger had taken the place of Thrift.

But there was one at least who did not laugh in court. That person was the accused. The notorious de Barral did not laugh because he was indignant. He was impervious to words, to facts, to inferences. It would have been impossible to make him see his guilt or his folly--either by evidence or argument--if anybody had tried to argue.

Neither did his daughter Flora try to argue with him. The cruelty of her position was so great, its complications so thorny, if I may express myself so, that a passive attitude was yet her best refuge--as it had been before her of so many women.

For that sort of inertia in woman is always enigmatic and therefore menacing. It

makes one pause. A woman may be a fool, a sleepy fool, an agitated fool, a too awfully noxious fool, and she may even be simply stupid. But she is never dense. She's never made of wood through and through as some men are. There is in woman always, somewhere, a spring. Whatever men don't know about women (and it may be a lot or it may be very little) men and even fathers do know that much. And that is why so many men are afraid of them.

Mr. Smith I believe was afraid of his daughter's quietness though of course he interpreted it in his own way.

He would, as Mr. Powell depicts, sit on the skylight and bend over the reclining girl, wondering what there was behind the lost gaze under the darkened eyelids in the still eyes. He would look and look and then he would say, whisper rather, it didn't take much for his voice to drop to a mere breath--he would declare, transferring his faded stare to the horizon, that he would never rest till he had "got her away from that man."

"You don't know what you are saying, papa."

She would try not to show her weariness, the nervous strain of these two men's antagonism around her person which was the cause of her languid attitudes. For as a matter of fact the sea agreed with her.

As likely as not Anthony would be walking on the other side of the deck. The strain was making him restless. He couldn't sit still anywhere. He had tried shutting himself up in his cabin; but that was no good. He would jump up to rush on deck and tramp, tramp up and down that poop till he felt ready to drop, without being able to wear down the agitation of his soul, generous indeed, but weighted by its envelope of blood and muscle and bone; handicapped by the brain creating precise images and everlastingly speculating, speculating--looking out for signs, watching for symptoms.

And Mr. Smith with a slight backward jerk of his small head at the footsteps on the other side of the skylight would insist in his awful, hopelessly gentle voice that he knew very well what he was saying. Hadn't she given herself to that man while he was locked up.

"Helpless, in jail, with no one to think of, nothing to look forward to, but my daughter. And then when they let me out at last I find her gone--for it amounts to this. Sold. Because you've sold yourself; you know you have."

With his round unmoved face, a lot of fine white hair waving in the wind- eddies of the spanker, his glance levelled over the sea he seemed to be addressing the

universe across her reclining form. She would protest sometimes.

"I wish you would not talk like this, papa. You are only tormenting me, and tormenting yourself."

"Yes, I am tormented enough," he admitted meaningly. But it was not talking about it that tormented him. It was thinking of it. And to sit and look at it was worse for him than it possibly could have been for her to go and give herself up, bad as that must have been.

"For of course you suffered. Don't tell me you didn't? You must have."

She had renounced very soon all attempts at protests. It was useless. It might have made things worse; and she did not want to quarrel with her father, the only human being that really cared for her, absolutely, evidently, completely--to the end. There was in him no pity, no generosity, nothing whatever of these fine things--it was for her, for her very own self such as it was, that this human being cared. This certitude would have made her put up with worse torments. For, of course, she too was being tormented. She felt also helpless, as if the whole enterprise had been too much for her. This is the sort of conviction which makes for quietude. She was becoming a fatalist.

What must have been rather appalling were the necessities of daily life, the intercourse of current trifles. That naturally had to go on. They wished good morning to each other, they sat down together to meals--and I believe there would be a game of cards now and then in the evening, especially at first. What frightened her most was the duplicity of her father, at least what looked like duplicity, when she remembered his persistent, insistent whispers on deck. However her father was a taciturn person as far back as she could remember him best--on the Parade. It was she who chattered, never troubling herself to discover whether he was pleased or displeased. And now she couldn't fathom his thoughts. Neither did she chatter to him. Anthony with a forced friendly smile as if frozen to his lips seemed only too thankful at not being made to speak. Mr. Smith sometimes forgot himself while studying his hand so long that Flora had to recall him to himself by a murmured "Papa--your lead." Then he apologized by a faint as if inward ejaculation "Beg your pardon, Captain." Naturally she addressed Anthony as Roderick and he addressed her as Flora. This was all the acting that was necessary to judge from the wincing twitch of the old man's mouth at every uttered "Flora." On hearing the rare "Rodericks" he had sometimes a scornful grimace as faint and faded and colourless as his whole stiff personality.

He would be the first to retire. He was not infirm. With him too the life on board

ship seemed to agree; but from a sense of duty, of affection, or to placate his hidden fury, his daughter always accompanied him to his state-room "to make him comfortable." She lighted his lamp, helped him into his dressing-gown or got him a book from a bookcase fitted in there--but this last rarely, because Mr. Smith used to declare "I am no reader" with something like pride in his low tones. Very often after kissing her good-night on the forehead he would treat her to some such fretful remark: "It's like being in jail--'pon my word. I suppose that man is out there waiting for you. Head jailer! Ough!"

She would smile vaguely; murmur a conciliatory "How absurd." But once, out of patience, she said quite sharply "Leave off. It hurts me. One would think you hate me."

"It isn't you I hate," he went on monotonously breathing at her. "No, it isn't you. But if I saw that you loved that man I think I could hate you too."

That word struck straight at her heart. "You wouldn't be the first then," she muttered bitterly. But he was busy with his fixed idea and uttered an awfully equable "But you don't! Unfortunate girl!"

She looked at him steadily for a time then said "Good-night, papa."

As a matter of fact Anthony very seldom waited for her alone at the table with the scattered cards, glasses, water-jug, bottles and soon. He took no more opportunities to be alone with her than was absolutely necessary for the edification of Mrs. Brown. Excellent, faithful woman; the wife of his still more excellent and faithful steward. And Flora wished all these excellent people, devoted to Anthony, she wished them all further; and especially the nice, pleasant-spoken Mrs. Brown with her beady, mobile eyes and her "Yes certainly, ma'am," which seemed to her to have a mocking sound. And so this short trip--to the Western Islands only--came to an end. It was so short that when young Powell joined the Ferndale by a memorable stroke of chance, no more than seven months had elapsed since the--let us say the liberation of the convict de Barral and his avatar into Mr. Smith.

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For the time the ship was loading in London Anthony took a cottage near a little country station in Essex, to house Mr. Smith and Mr. Smith's daughter. It was altogether his idea. How far it was necessary for Mr. Smith to seek rural retreat I don't know. Perhaps to some extent it was a judicious arrangement. There were some obligations incumbent on the liberated de Barral (in connection with reporting himself to the police I imagine) which Mr. Smith was not anxious to

perform. De Barral had to vanish; the theory was that de Barral had vanished, and it had to be upheld. Poor Flora liked the country, even if the spot had nothing more to recommend it than its retired character.

Now and then Captain Anthony ran down; but as the station was a real wayside one, with no early morning trains up, he could never stay for more than the afternoon. It appeared that he must sleep in town so as to be early on board his ship. The weather was magnificent and whenever the captain of the Ferndale was seen on a brilliant afternoon coming down the road Mr. Smith would seize his stick and toddle off for a solitary walk. But whether he would get tired or because it gave him some satisfaction to see "that man" go away--or for some cunning reason of his own, he was always back before the hour of Anthony's departure. On approaching the cottage he would see generally "that man" lying on the grass in the orchard at some distance from his daughter seated in a chair brought out of the cottage's living room. Invariably Mr. Smith made straight for them and as invariably had the feeling that his approach was not disturbing a very intimate conversation. He sat with them, through a silent hour or so, and then it would be time for Anthony to go. Mr. Smith, perhaps from discretion, would casually vanish a minute or so before, and then watch through the diamond panes of an upstairs room "that man" take a lingering look outside the gate at the invisible Flora, lift his hat, like a caller, and go off down the road. Then only Mr. Smith would join his daughter again.

These were the bad moments for her. Not always, of course, but frequently. It was nothing extraordinary to hear Mr. Smith begin gently with some observation like this:

"That man is getting tired of you."

He would never pronounce Anthony's name. It was always "that man."

Generally she would remain mute with wide open eyes gazing at nothing between the gnarled fruit trees. Once, however, she got up and walked into the cottage. Mr. Smith followed her carrying the chair. He banged it down resolutely and in that smooth inexpressive tone so many ears used to bend eagerly to catch when it came from the Great de Barral he said:

"Let's get away."

She had the strength of mind not to spin round. On the contrary she went on to a shabby bit of a mirror on the wall. In the greenish glass her own face looked far off like the livid face of a drowned corpse at the bottom of a pool. She laughed faintly.

"I tell you that man's getting--"

"Papa," she interrupted him. "I have no illusions as to myself. It has happened to me before but--"

Her voice failing her suddenly her father struck in with quite an unwonted animation. "Let's make a rush for it, then."

Having mastered both her fright and her bitterness, she turned round, sat down and allowed her astonishment to be seen. Mr. Smith sat down too, his knees together and bent at right angles, his thin legs parallel to each other and his hands resting on the arms of the wooden arm-chair. His hair had grown long, his head was set stiffly, there was something fatuously venerable in his aspect.

"You can't care for him. Don't tell me. I understand your motive. And I have called you an unfortunate girl. You are that as much as if you had gone on the streets. Yes. Don't interrupt me, Flora. I was everlastingly being interrupted at the trial and I can't stand it any more. I won't be interrupted by my own child. And when I think that it is on the very day before they let me out that you . . . "

He had wormed this fact out of her by that time because Flora had got tired of evading the question. He had been very much struck and distressed. Was that the trust she had in him? Was that a proof of confidence and love? The very day before! Never given him even half a chance. It was as at the trial. They never gave him a chance. They would not give him time. And there was his own daughter acting exactly as his bitterest enemies had done. Not giving him time!

The monotony of that subdued voice nearly lulled her dismay to sleep. She listened to the unavoidable things he was saying.

"But what induced that man to marry you? Of course he's a gentleman. One can see that. And that makes it worse. Gentlemen don't understand anything about city affairs--finance. Why!--the people who started the cry after me were a firm of gentlemen. The counsel, the judge--all gentlemen--quite out of it! No notion of . . . And then he's a sailor too. Just a skipper--"

"My grandfather was nothing else," she interrupted. And he made an angular gesture of impatience.

"Yes. But what does a silly sailor know of business? Nothing. No conception. He can have no idea of what it means to be the daughter of Mr. de Barral--even after his enemies had smashed him. What on earth induced him--"

She made a movement because the level voice was getting on her nerves. And he paused, but only to go on again in the same tone with the remark:

"Of course you are pretty. And that's why you are lost--like many other poor girls. Unfortunate is the word for you."

She said: "It may be. Perhaps it is the right word; but listen, papa. I mean to be honest."

He began to exhale more speeches.

"Just the sort of man to get tired and then leave you and go off with his beastly ship. And anyway you can never be happy with him. Look at his face. I want to save you. You see I was not perhaps a very good husband to your poor mother. She would have done better to have left me long before she died. I have been thinking it all over. I won't have you unhappy."

He ran his eyes over her with an attention which was surprisingly noticeable. Then said, "H'm! Yes. Let's clear out before it is too late. Quietly, you and I."

She said as if inspired and with that calmness which despair often gives: "There is no money to go away with, papa."

He rose up straightening himself as though he were a hinged figure. She said decisively:

"And of course you wouldn't think of deserting me, papa?"

"Of course not," sounded his subdued tone. And he left her, gliding away with his walk which Mr. Powell described to me as being as level and wary as his voice. He walked as if he were carrying a glass full of water on his head.

Flora naturally said nothing to Anthony of that edifying conversation. His generosity might have taken alarm at it and she did not want to be left behind to manage her father alone. And moreover she was too honest. She would be honest at whatever cost. She would not be the first to speak. Never. And the thought came into her head: "I am indeed an unfortunate creature!"

It was by the merest coincidence that Anthony coming for the afternoon two days later had a talk with Mr. Smith in the orchard. Flora for some reason or other had left them for a moment; and Anthony took that opportunity to be frank with Mr. Smith. He said: "It seems to me, sir, that you think Flora has not done very

well for herself. Well, as to that I can't say anything. All I want you to know is that I have tried to do the right thing." And then he explained that he had willed everything he was possessed of to her. "She didn't tell you, I suppose?"

Mr. Smith shook his head slightly. And Anthony, trying to be friendly, was just saying that he proposed to keep the ship away from home for at least two years. "I think, sir, that from every point of view it would be best," when Flora came back and the conversation, cut short in that direction, languished and died. Later in the evening, after Anthony had been gone for hours, on the point of separating for the night, Mr. Smith remarked suddenly to his daughter after a long period of brooding:

"A will is nothing. One tears it up. One makes another." Then after reflecting for a minute he added unemotionally:

"One tells lies about it."

Flora, patient, steeled against every hurt and every disgust to the point of wondering at herself, said: "You push your dislike of--of--Roderick too far, papa. You have no regard for me. You hurt me."

He, as ever inexpressive to the point of terrifying her sometimes by the contrast of his placidity and his words, turned away from her a pair of faded eyes.

"I wonder how far your dislike goes," he began. "His very name sticks in your throat. I've noticed it. It hurts me. What do you think of that? You might remember that you are not the only person that's hurt by your folly, by your hastiness, by your recklessness." He brought back his eyes to her face. "And the very day before they were going to let me out." His feeble voice failed him altogether, the narrow compressed lips only trembling for a time before he added with that extraordinary equanimity of tone, "I call it sinful."

Flora made no answer. She judged it simpler, kinder and certainly safer to let him talk himself out. This, Mr. Smith, being naturally taciturn, never took very long to do. And we must not imagine that this sort of thing went on all the time. She had a few good days in that cottage. The absence of Anthony was a relief and his visits were pleasurable. She was quieter. He was quieter too. She was almost sorry when the time to join the ship arrived. It was a moment of anguish, of excitement; they arrived at the dock in the evening and Flora after "making her father comfortable" according to established usage lingered in the state-room long enough to notice that he was surprised. She caught his pale eyes observing her quite stonily. Then she went out after a cheery good-night.

Contrary to her hopes she found Anthony yet in the saloon. Sitting in his arm-chair at the head of the table he was picking up some business papers which he put hastily in his breast pocket and got up. He asked her if her day, travelling up to town and then doing some shopping, had tired her. She shook her head. Then he wanted to know in a half-jocular way how she felt about going away, and for a long voyage this time.

"Does it matter how I feel?" she asked in a tone that cast a gloom over his face. He answered with repressed violence which she did not expect:

"No, it does not matter, because I cannot go without you. I've told you . . . You know it. You don't think I could."

"I assure you I haven't the slightest wish to evade my obligations," she said steadily. "Even if I could. Even if I dared, even if I had to die for it!"

He looked thunderstruck. They stood facing each other at the end of the saloon. Anthony stuttered. "Oh no. You won't die. You don't mean it. You have taken kindly to the sea."

She laughed, but she felt angry.

"No, I don't mean it. I tell you I don't mean to evade my obligations. I shall live on . . . feeling a little crushed, nevertheless."

"Crushed!" he repeated. "What's crushing you?"

"Your magnanimity," she said sharply. But her voice was softened after a time. "Yet I don't know. There is a perfection in it--do you understand me, Roderick?--which makes it almost possible to bear."

He sighed, looked away, and remarked that it was time to put out the lamp in the saloon. The permission was only till ten o'clock.

"But you needn't mind that so much in your cabin. Just see that the curtains of the ports are drawn close and that's all. The steward might have forgotten to do it. He lighted your reading lamp in there before he went ashore for a last evening with his wife. I don't know if it was wise to get rid of Mrs. Brown. You will have to look after yourself, Flora."

He was quite anxious; but Flora as a matter of fact congratulated herself on the absence of Mrs. Brown. No sooner had she closed the door of her state-room than she murmured fervently, "Yes! Thank goodness, she is gone." There would

be no gentle knock, followed by her appearance with her equivocal stare and the intolerable: "Can I do anything for you, ma'am?" which poor Flora had learned to fear and hate more than any voice or any words on board that ship--her only refuge from the world which had no use for her, for her imperfections and for her troubles.

* * * * *

Mrs. Brown had been very much vexed at her dismissal. The Browns were a childless couple and the arrangement had suited them perfectly. Their resentment was very bitter. Mrs. Brown had to remain ashore alone with her rage, but the steward was nursing his on board. Poor Flora had no greater enemy, the aggrieved mate had no greater sympathizer. And Mrs. Brown, with a woman's quick power of observation and inference (the putting of two and two together) had come to a certain conclusion which she had imparted to her husband before leaving the ship. The morose steward permitted himself once to make an allusion to it in Powell's hearing. It was in the officers' mess-room at the end of a meal while he lingered after putting a fruit pie on the table. He and the chief mate started a dialogue about the alarming change in the captain, the sallow steward looking down with a sinister frown, Franklin rolling upwards his eyes, sentimental in a red face. Young Powell had heard a lot of that sort of thing by that time. It was growing monotonous; it had always sounded to him a little absurd. He struck in impatiently with the remark that such lamentations over a man merely because he had taken a wife seemed to him like lunacy.

Franklin muttered, "Depends on what the wife is up to." The steward leaning against the bulkhead near the door glowered at Powell, that newcomer, that ignoramus, that stranger without right or privileges. He snarled:

"Wife! Call her a wife, do you?"

"What the devil do you mean by this?" exclaimed young Powell.

"I know what I know. My old woman has not been six months on board for nothing. You had better ask her when we get back."

And meeting sullenly the withering stare of Mr. Powell the steward retreated backwards.

Our young friend turned at once upon the mate. "And you let that confounded bottle-washer talk like this before you, Mr. Franklin. Well, I am astonished."

"Oh, it isn't what you think. It isn't what you think." Mr. Franklin looked more

apoplectic than ever. "If it comes to that I could astonish you. But it's no use. I myself can hardly . . . You couldn't understand. I hope you won't try to make mischief. There was a time, young fellow, when I would have dared any man--any man, you hear?--to make mischief between me and Captain Anthony. But not now. Not now. There's a change! Not in me though . . . "

Young Powell rejected with indignation any suggestion of making mischief. "Who do you take me for?" he cried. "Only you had better tell that steward to be careful what he says before me or I'll spoil his good looks for him for a month and will leave him to explain the why of it to the captain the best way he can."

This speech established Powell as a champion of Mrs. Anthony. Nothing more bearing on the question was ever said before him. He did not care for the steward's black looks; Franklin, never conversational even at the best of times and avoiding now the only topic near his heart, addressed him only on matters of duty. And for that, too, Powell cared very little. The woes of the apoplectic mate had begun to bore him long before. Yet he felt lonely a bit at times. Therefore the little intercourse with Mrs. Anthony either in one dog-watch or the other was something to be looked forward to. The captain did not mind it. That was evident from his manner. One night he inquired (they were then alone on the poop) what they had been talking about that evening? Powell had to confess that it was about the ship. Mrs. Anthony had been asking him questions.

"Takes interest--eh?" jerked out the captain moving rapidly up and down the weather side of the poop.

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Anthony seems to get hold wonderfully of what one's telling her."

"Sailor's granddaughter. One of the old school. Old sea-dog of the best kind, I believe," ejaculated the captain, swinging past his motionless second officer and leaving the words behind him like a trail of sparks succeeded by a perfect conversational darkness, because, for the next two hours till he left the deck, he didn't open his lips again.

On another occasion . . . we mustn't forget that the ship had crossed the line and was adding up south latitude every day by then . . . on another occasion, about seven in the evening, Powell on duty, heard his name uttered softly in the companion. The captain was on the stairs, thin- faced, his eyes sunk, on his arm a Shetland wool wrap.

"Mr. Powell--here."

"Yes, sir."

"Give this to Mrs. Anthony. Evenings are getting chilly."

And the haggard face sank out of sight. Mrs. Anthony was surprised on seeing the shawl.

"The captain wants you to put this on," explained young Powell, and as she raised herself in her seat he dropped it on her shoulders. She wrapped herself up closely.

"Where was the captain?" she asked.

"He was in the companion. Called me on purpose," said Powell, and then retreated discreetly, because she looked as though she didn't want to talk any more that evening. Mr. Smith--the old gentleman--was as usual sitting on the skylight near her head, brooding over the long chair but by no means inimical, as far as his unreadable face went, to those conversations of the two youngest people on board. In fact they seemed to give him some pleasure. Now and then he would raise his faded china eyes to the animated face of Mr. Powell thoughtfully. When the young sailor was by, the old man became less rigid, and when his daughter, on rare occasions, smiled at some artless tale of Mr. Powell, the inexpressive face of Mr. Smith reflected dimly that flash of evanescent mirth. For Mr. Powell had come now to entertain his captain's wife with anecdotes from the not very distant past when he was a boy, on board various ships,--funny things do happen on board ship. Flora was quite surprised at times to find herself amused. She was even heard to laugh twice in the course of a month. It was not a loud sound but it was startling enough at the after-end of the Ferndale where low tones or silence were the rule. The second time this happened the captain himself must have been startled somewhere down below; because he emerged from the depths of his unobtrusive existence and began his tramping on the opposite side of the poop.

Almost immediately he called his young second officer over to him. This was not done in displeasure. The glance he fastened on Mr. Powell conveyed a sort of approving wonder. He engaged him in desultory conversation as if for the only purpose of keeping a man who could provoke such a sound, near his person. Mr. Powell felt himself liked. He felt it. Liked by that haggard, restless man who threw at him disconnected phrases to which his answers were, "Yes, sir," "No, sir," "Oh, certainly," "I suppose so, sir,"--and might have been clearly anything else for all the other cared.

It was then, Mr. Powell told me, that he discovered in himself an already old-established liking for Captain Anthony. He also felt sorry for him without being

able to discover the origins of that sympathy of which he had become so suddenly aware.

Meantime Mr. Smith, bending forward stiffly as though he had a hinged back, was speaking to his daughter.

She was a child no longer. He wanted to know if she believed in--in hell. In eternal punishment?

His peculiar voice, as if filtered through cotton-wool was inaudible on the other side of the deck. Poor Flora, taken very much unawares, made an inarticulate murmur, shook her head vaguely, and glanced in the direction of the pacing Anthony who was not looking her way. It was no use glancing in that direction. Of young Powell, leaning against the mizzen-mast and facing his captain she could only see the shoulder and part of a blue serge back.

And the unworried, unaccented voice of her father went on tormenting her.

"You see, you must understand. When I came out of jail it was with joy. That is, my soul was fairly torn in two--but anyway to see you happy--I had made up my mind to that. Once I could be sure that you were happy then of course I would have had no reason to care for life--strictly speaking--which is all right for an old man; though naturally . . . no reason to wish for death either. But this sort of life! What sense, what meaning, what value has it either for you or for me? It's just sitting down to look at the death, that's coming, coming. What else is it? I don't know how you can put up with that. I don't think you can stand it for long. Some day you will jump overboard."

Captain Anthony had stopped for a moment staring ahead from the break of the poop, and poor Flora sent at his back a look of despairing appeal which would have moved a heart of stone. But as though she had done nothing he did not stir in the least. She got out of the long chair and went towards the companion. Her father followed carrying a few small objects, a handbag, her handkerchief, a book. They went down together.

It was only then that Captain Anthony turned, looked at the place they had vacated and resumed his tramping, but not his desultory conversation with his second officer. His nervous exasperation had grown so much that now very often he used to lose control of his voice. If he did not watch himself it would suddenly die in his throat. He had to make sure before he ventured on the simplest saying, an order, a remark on the wind, a simple good-morning. That's why his utterance was abrupt, his answers to people startlingly brusque and often not forthcoming at all.

It happens to the most resolute of men to find himself at grips not only with unknown forces, but with a well-known force the real might of which he had not understood. Anthony had discovered that he was not the proud master but the chafing captive of his generosity. It rose in front of him like a wall which his respect for himself forbade him to scale. He said to himself: "Yes, I was a fool--but she has trusted me!" Trusted! A terrible word to any man somewhat exceptional in a world in which success has never been found in renunciation and good faith. And it must also be said, in order not to make Anthony more stupidly sublime than he was, that the behaviour of Flora kept him at a distance. The girl was afraid to add to the exasperation of her father. It was her unhappy lot to be made more wretched by the only affection which she could not suspect. She could not be angry with it, however, and out of deference for that exaggerated sentiment she hardly dared to look otherwise than by stealth at the man whose masterful compassion had carried her off. And quite unable to understand the extent of Anthony's delicacy, she said to herself that "he didn't care." He probably was beginning at bottom to detest her--like the governess, like the maiden lady, like the German woman, like Mrs. Fyne, like Mr. Fyne--only he was extraordinary, he was generous. At the same time she had moments of irritation. He was violent, headstrong--perhaps stupid. Well, he had had his way.

A man who has had his way is seldom happy, for generally he finds that the way does not lead very far on this earth of desires which can never be fully satisfied. Anthony had entered with extreme precipitation the enchanted gardens of Armida saying to himself "At last!" As to Armida, herself, he was not going to offer her any violence. But now he had discovered that all the enchantment was in Armida herself, in Armida's smiles. This Armida did not smile. She existed, unapproachable, behind the blank wall of his renunciation. His force, fit for action, experienced the impatience, the indignation, almost the despair of his vitality arrested, bound, stilled, progressively worn down, frittered away by Time; by that force blind and insensible, which seems inert and yet uses one's life up by its imperceptible action, dropping minute after minute on one's living heart like drops of water wearing down a stone.

He upbraided himself. What else could he have expected? He had rushed in like a ruffian; he had dragged the poor defenceless thing by the hair of her head, as it were, on board that ship. It was really atrocious. Nothing assured him that his person could be attractive to this or any other woman. And his proceedings were enough in themselves to make anyone odious. He must have been bereft of his senses. She must fatally detest and fear him. Nothing could make up for such brutality. And yet somehow he resented this very attitude which seemed to him completely justifiable. Surely he was not too monstrous (morally) to be looked at frankly sometimes. But no! She wouldn't. Well, perhaps, some day . . . Only he

was not going ever to attempt to beg for forgiveness. With the repulsion she felt for his person she would certainly misunderstand the most guarded words, the most careful advances. Never! Never!

It would occur to Anthony at the end of such meditations that death was not an unfriendly visitor after all. No wonder then that even young Powell, his faculties having been put on the alert, began to think that there was something unusual about the man who had given him his chance in life. Yes, decidedly, his captain was "strange." There was something wrong somewhere, he said to himself, never guessing that his young and candid eyes were in the presence of a passion profound, tyrannical and mortal, discovering its own existence, astounded at feeling itself helpless and dismayed at finding itself incurable.

Powell had never before felt this mysterious uneasiness so strongly as on that evening when it had been his good fortune to make Mrs. Anthony laugh a little by his artless prattle. Standing out of the way, he had watched his captain walk the weather-side of the poop, he took full cognizance of his liking for that inexplicably strange man and saw him swerve towards the companion and go down below with sympathetic if utterly uncomprehending eyes.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Smith came up alone and manifested a desire for a little conversation. He, too, if not so mysterious as the captain, was not very comprehensible to Mr. Powell's uninformed candour. He often favoured thus the second officer. His talk alluded somewhat enigmatically and often without visible connection to Mr. Powell's friendliness towards himself and his daughter. "For I am well aware that we have no friends on board this ship, my dear young man," he would add, "except yourself. Flora feels that too."

And Mr. Powell, flattered and embarrassed, could but emit a vague murmur of protest. For the statement was true in a sense, though the fact was in itself insignificant. The feelings of the ship's company could not possibly matter to the captain's wife and to Mr. Smith--her father. Why the latter should so often allude to it was what surprised our Mr. Powell. This was by no means the first occasion. More like the twentieth rather. And in his weak voice, with his monotonous intonation, leaning over the rail and looking at the water the other continued this conversation, or rather his remarks, remarks of such a monstrous nature that Mr. Powell had no option but to accept them for gruesome jesting.

"For instance," said Mr. Smith, "that mate, Franklin, I believe he would just as soon see us both overboard as not."

"It's not so bad as that," laughed Mr. Powell, feeling uncomfortable, because his mind did not accommodate itself easily to exaggeration of statement. "He isn't a

bad chap really," he added, very conscious of Mr. Franklin's offensive manner of which instances were not far to seek. "He's such a fool as to be jealous. He has been with the captain for years. It's not for me to say, perhaps, but I think the captain has spoiled all that gang of old servants. They are like a lot of pet old dogs. Wouldn't let anybody come near him if they could help it. I've never seen anything like it. And the second mate, I believe, was like that too."

"Well, he isn't here, luckily. There would have been one more enemy," said Mr. Smith. "There's enough of them without him. And you being here instead of him makes it much more pleasant for my daughter and myself. One feels there may be a friend in need. For really, for a woman all alone on board ship amongst a lot of unfriendly men . . . "

"But Mrs Anthony is not alone," exclaimed Powell. "There's you, and there's the . . . "

Mr. Smith interrupted him.

"Nobody's immortal. And there are times when one feels ashamed to live. Such an evening as this for instance."

It was a lovely evening; the colours of a splendid sunset had died out and the breath of a warm breeze seemed to have smoothed out the sea. Away to the south the sheet lightning was like the flashing of an enormous lantern hidden under the horizon. In order to change the conversation Mr. Powell said:

"Anyway no one can charge you with being a Jonah, Mr. Smith. We have had a magnificent quick passage so far. The captain ought to be pleased. And I suppose you are not sorry either."

This diversion was not successful. Mr. Smith emitted a sort of bitter chuckle and said: "Jonah! That's the fellow that was thrown overboard by some sailors. It seems to me it's very easy at sea to get rid of a person one does not like. The sea does not give up its dead as the earth does."

"You forget the whale, sir," said young Powell.

Mr. Smith gave a start. "Eh? What whale? Oh! Jonah. I wasn't thinking of Jonah. I was thinking of this passage which seems so quick to you. But only think what it is to me? It isn't a life, going about the sea like this. And, for instance, if one were to fall ill, there isn't a doctor to find out what's the matter with one. It's worrying. It makes me anxious at times."

"Is Mrs. Anthony not feeling well?" asked Powell. But Mr. Smith's remark was not meant for Mrs. Anthony. She was well. He himself was well. It was the captain's health that did not seem quite satisfactory. Had Mr. Powell noticed his appearance?

Mr. Powell didn't know enough of the captain to judge. He couldn't tell. But he observed thoughtfully that Mr. Franklin had been saying the same thing. And Franklin had known the captain for years. The mate was quite worried about it.

This intelligence startled Mr. Smith considerably. "Does he think he is in danger of dying?" he exclaimed with an animation quite extraordinary for him, which horrified Mr. Powell.

"Heavens! Die! No! Don't you alarm yourself, sir. I've never heard a word about danger from Mr. Franklin."

"Well, well," sighed Mr. Smith and left the poop for the saloon rather abruptly.

As a matter of fact Mr. Franklin had been on deck for some considerable time. He had come to relieve young Powell; but seeing him engaged in talk with the "enemy"--with one of the "enemies" at least--had kept at a distance, which, the poop of the Ferndale being aver seventy feet long, he had no difficulty in doing. Mr. Powell saw him at the head of the ladder leaning on his elbow, melancholy and silent. "Oh! Here you are, sir."

"Here I am. Here I've been ever since six o'clock. Didn't want to interrupt the pleasant conversation. If you like to put in half of your watch below jawing with a dear friend, that's not my affair. Funny taste though."

"He isn't a bad chap," said the impartial Powell.

The mate snorted angrily, tapping the deck with his foot; then: "Isn't he? Well, give him my love when you come together again for another nice long yarn."

"I say, Mr. Franklin, I wonder the captain don't take offence at your manners."

"The captain. I wish to goodness he would start a row with me. Then I should know at least I am somebody on board. I'd welcome it, Mr. Powell. I'd rejoice. And dam' me I would talk back too till I roused him. He's a shadow of himself. He walks about his ship like a ghost. He's fading away right before our eyes. But of course you don't see. You don't care a hang. Why should you?"

Mr. Powell did not wait for more. He went down on the main deck. Without

taking the mate's jeremiads seriously he put them beside the words of Mr. Smith. He had grown already attached to Captain Anthony. There was something not only attractive but compelling in the man. Only it is very difficult for youth to believe in the menace of death. Not in the fact itself, but in its proximity to a breathing, moving, talking, superior human being, showing no sign of disease. And Mr. Powell thought that this talk was all nonsense. But his curiosity was awakened. There was something, and at any time some circumstance might occur . . . No, he would never find out . . . There was nothing to find out, most likely. Mr. Powell went to his room where he tried to read a book he had already read a good many times. Presently a bell rang for the officers' supper.